

Standards and Assessment Bulletin

A publication of the Vermont Department of Education

May 2009

Volume 2, Issue 2

In this issue

Field Notes 1, 4

Building Assessment
Literacy 2

From the Mailbag :
Question of the Day 3

Data Grab : Statistic of
the Day 3

Odds & Ends 5

Field Notes

In-depth explorations of innovation in schools



A Community of Learners at Burlington High School

By Pat Johnson

"I can't overstate the importance of being very deliberate in how we respond to students who are not on grade level when they arrive here." So said Amy Mellenkamp, principal of Burlington High School when asked what she would highlight to account for significant improvement in student achievement as indicated by NECAP scores.

Specific, mandatory support is provided in both reading and math for students who are below grade level when they arrive at the high school. In a demonstration of collaboration between the middle schools and the high school, the Gates-MacGinitie reading assessment is given to all eighth graders, usually in May. Based on these results and NECAP scores, students may be assigned to an additional class in reading or math.

The academic support provided to students is in addition to their regular English or Math class and are part of the student's schedule. There is a Reading Strategies class for students behind in reading and a Math Lab for students below grade level in math. Students may receive the support classes for a semester or for the whole year, depending on results of assessments given in January.

In the Reading Strategies class, students learn specific skills to help them successfully manage high school reading material and demands. The course is designed to increase reading comprehension skills and help students learn a variety of skills for understanding, interpreting and analyzing text.

The Math Lab provides individualized support through the Accelerated Math program. Students take a diagnostic test and based on results, work on specific skills. Students are able to move ahead as quickly as they demonstrate mastery of concepts, allowing many students to close gaps in learning and "graduate" from Math Lab support. If new problems arise, students may re-enter the lab as needed. This can be a particular boon to students who are English language learners. Students may also be referred to the Homework Center. Here they can receive individual attention from tutors (UVM students, retired teachers, para-educators) on their specific homework assignments. Students may be assigned to the homework center or may choose to come on their own.

(continued on pg. 4)

Building Assessment Literacy

A focus on assessment design and interpretation of results



Vermont Item Bank Assessment

What is the Vermont Item Bank Assessment?

The Vermont Item Bank Assessment is a tool designed to bridge the information gap between the end-of-grade-7 expectations (8th grade NECAP test) and the end-of-grade-10 expectations (11th grade NECAP test) in *reading* and in *mathematics*. The Department of Education recognizes the need of schools/districts to address this information gap. The Item Bank Assessment is intended to enable teachers to collect information and monitor student progress on the *Vermont Grade Expectations* during grades 8, 9, and 10.

The Vermont Item Bank is NOT designed to be NECAP test preparation material. It is designed to give educators *diagnostic* information to inform their instruction and improve student learning.

Identified Vermont schools are required to create common local assessments of their curriculum and the *Vermont Grade Expectations*. Some districts have spent a good deal of time and effort creating assessments. The success of these efforts has been mixed. The collection and analysis of data is important, and to that end the Department of Education encourages schools to use the Item Bank as one source of information to use for their local data collection.

Who developed the Vermont Item Bank Assessment?

A group of Vermont Title I high schools agreed to partner with the DOE to develop a common local assessment tool. Priestley Publishing of Stowe, VT, was chosen to develop the item bank in collaboration with DOE content specialists. Educators from partner schools and other VT schools selected reading passages and reviewed all items in the mathematics and reading assessments.

How are the assessments constructed?

- The assessments span the breadth of the Reading and Mathematics Grade Expectations.
- Each item is aligned with the Grade Expectations for grade 8 or 10.
- Each item is identified with a Depth of Knowledge level.
- The wording of items is designed to be accessible for the most number of students.
- There is a range of types of items (multiple choice, short answer, constructed response).

Are there teacher support materials?

Answer keys provide rationales which reveal student misconceptions/misunderstanding for each incorrect answer on the multiple choice questions as well as sample responses for the constructed response items. The Item Bank intentionally does not include rubrics or benchmarked samples. Research shows that looking at student work collaboratively enhances professional practice and improves student learning. The Department of Education encourages teachers to examine student work collaboratively in order to define common levels of expectations and identify effective instructional practices. The "Suggestions and Guidelines for Use" document included with each assessment gives further information on how to effectively use the item bank in both classroom and school/district settings.

(continued on pg. 4)

From the Mailbag: Question of the Day



“How did Vermont students do on NECAP this year compared to past years?”

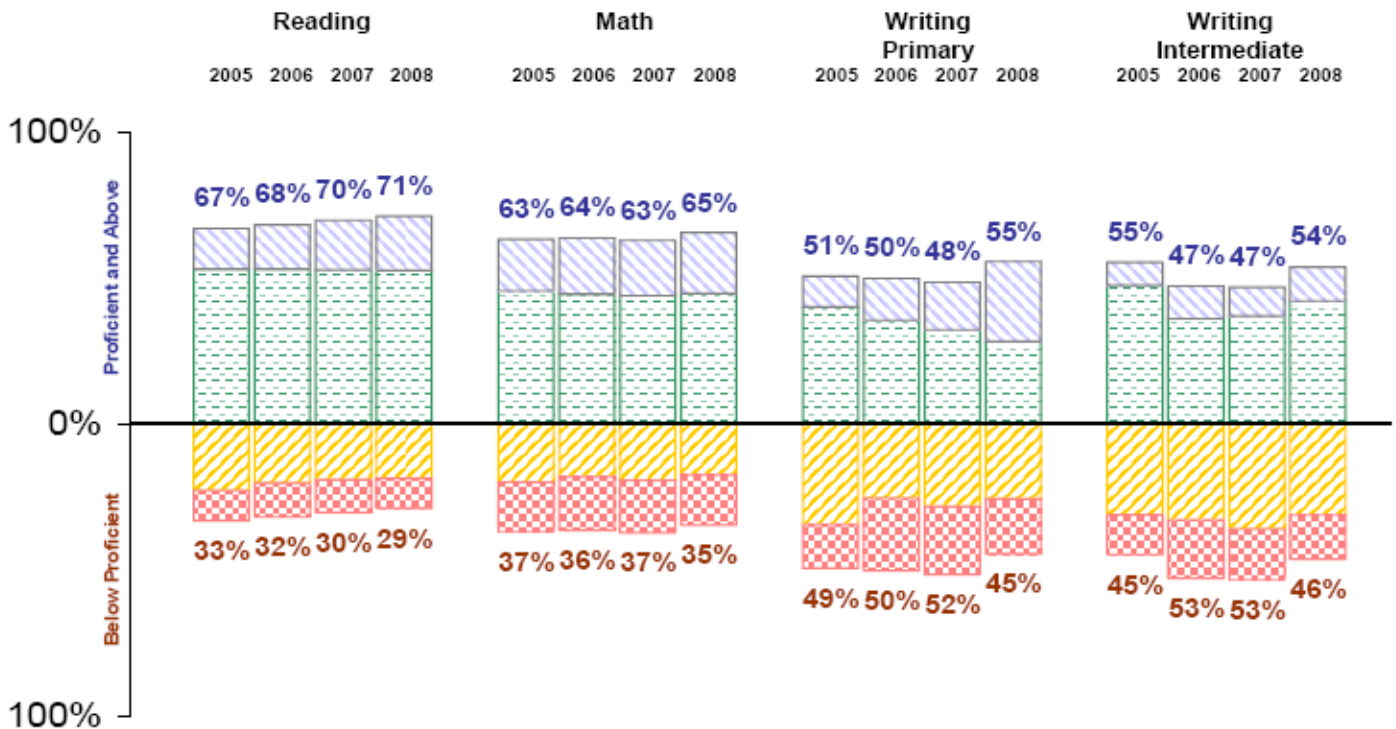
Students in grades 3-8 are continuing to make progress on NECAP Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. Commissioner Armando Vilaseca said, “The good news here is the steady upward trend in scores over the last four years.”

*Have a question for the S&A team that you would like to see answered in this section?
Please contact Susan Hayes at 802-828-5892 or susan.hayes@state.vt.us*

Data Grab: Statistic of the Day



Grades 3-8 NECAP student performance over past 4 years



(continued from pg. 1)

Over the past several years the number of supports has expanded at the high school but more importantly, perhaps, is the system for assuring that students who need the support get it. Pre-assessments, automatic scheduling of support during the day, accountability and support for getting homework done all convey the expectation that ALL students can succeed.

This year for the first time, there was some test preparation prior to students taking state (NECAP) assessment in October and an effort made to make the NECAP assessment meaningful for students. Teachers decided to award additional points to a student's grade if they scored proficient or better on the NECAP. This created some investment in the results for students and gave them a reason to do their best.

In addition, juniors were assigned to a homeroom with a math teacher for the first two months of school and homeroom time was devoted to a review of math concepts students had not mastered according to last year's NECAP results. In English classes teachers used released items and items from the state's newly developed "Item Bank" as formative assessments to identify areas of weakness. In May, the science teachers will take a similar approach and use released items from last year's NECAP science test in preparation for the NECAP science test.

Another key to success at the high school is on-going professional development for the teachers. But unlike much of the professional development teachers usually experience, the focus of this professional development has not been bringing "experts" in to share their knowledge. It, instead, has been creating more time for teachers to meet together to discuss successes and challenges in their teaching and learn from each others' expertise.

Meeting as professional learning communities helps create a sense of shared responsibility for student success. Students are not expected to "do it" all alone and teachers are realizing they aren't alone either. They can turn to their colleagues for help and support. Burlington High School's students and faculty are truly becoming a community of learners.

(continued from pg. 2)

Reading assessments for end-of-8th grade GEs and end-of-10th grade GEs

Progress assessments (8 at each grade level) have both literary and informational text to allow teachers to assess and compare student performance on both types of text.

Strand assessments assess either literary OR informational texts to allow teachers to delve deeper into student performance on vocabulary, initial understanding, and analysis/interpretation.

Mathematics assessments for end-of-8th grade GEs and end-of-10th grade GEs

Progress assessments (8 at each grade level) span a range of GEs and will allow teachers to assess and compare student performance across the math strands (N&O, G&M, F&A, DSP).

Grade Expectation assessment focuses on a single GE. This will allow teachers to investigate student performance and their misconceptions around a specific GE.

The VT Item Bank lives in the *Activities/Assessment* database of Learning Village:

<http://rlv.education.vermont.gov>

User name: vt.teacher

Password: Vermont

If you have additional questions about the VT Item Bank, please contact:

Arlyn Brucoli (Riverdeep/Learning Village) arlyn.brucoli@state.vt.us

Marty Gephart (reading) marty.gephart@state.vt.us

Denise Maurice (math) denise.maurice@state.vt.us

Odds and Ends...

A few things we thought you would appreciate knowing



Educators Needed to Participate in an Item Review & Bias/Sensitivity Review for the 2010 NECAP Science Assessment

The department's Standards and Assessment Team, in cooperation with Measured Progress, announces an opportunity for science teachers and other educators to apply to take part in the on-going development of the NECAP science assessment in August. Selected participants will either be reviewing items or taking part in the bias and sensitivity review of each test item. View additional information and download the application form here: http://education.vermont.gov/new/html/pgm_assessment/necap.html

Deadline for applications is May 15, 2009.

**For specific questions please contact Mary Ann Minardo, Director of Assessment
(828-5410, maryann.minardo@state.vt.us).**

Quote of the Day:

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

—Henry B. Adams

Standards & Assessment Team

Gail Taylor, Director S&A 828-5158 gail.taylor@state.vt.us	Steve Magill, Analysis and Data Director 828-6565 steve.magill@state.vt.us	Denise Maurice, Math Assessment Coord. 828-2173 denise.maurice@state.vt.us
Michael Hock, Assessment Director 828-3115 michael.hock@state.vt.us	Nancy Lewis, Statistician 828-3148 nancy.lewis@state.vt.us	Kathy Renfrew, Math & Science Assmt. Coord. 828-6561 kathy.renfrew@state.vt.us
Pat Fitzsimmons, Co-Assistant Director S&A 828-0196 pat.fitzsimmons@state.vt.us	Elsie Penniman, Statistician 828-3148 elsie.penniman@state.vt.us	Gail Hall, Science Assessment Coordinator 828-0156 gail.hall@state.vt.us
Marty Gephart, Co-Assistant Director S&A 828-1462 marty.gephart@state.vt.	Aryln Bruccoli, Ed. Tech. Consultant 828-0223 arlyn.bruccoli@state.vt.us	Sigrid Lumbra, Social Studies Consultant 828-0200 sigrid.lumbra@state.vt.us
Pat Johnson, School Support Coordinator 828-5124 pat.johnson@state.vt.us	Jim McCobb, ELL Program Coordinator 828-0185 james.mccobb@state.vt.us	Geof Hewitt, Writing Consultant 828-3158 geof.hewitt@state.vt.us
Kathy Blanchard, School Support Coordinator 828-5404 kathy.blanchard@state.vt.us	Cindy Moran, Alt. Assessment Coordinator 828-0646 cindy.moran@state.vt.us	Noel Bryant, Enrichment Consultant 828-0215 noel.bryant@state.vt.us
Tina Muncy, School Support Coordinator 828-1184 tina.muncy@state.vt.us	Greg Wylde, Alt. Assessment Coordinator 828-1338 greg.wylde@state.vt.us	Gail Kilkelly, Arts & World Languages Consult. 828-6560 gail.kilkelly@state.vt.us
Lisa Lovelette, School Support Coordinator 828-0211 lisa.lovelette@state.vt.us	Mary Ann Minardo, Assessment Consultant 828-5410 maryann.minardo@state.vt.us	Rose Wheeler, Administrative Assistant 828-3114 rose.wheeler@state.vt.us
Peter Thoms, Policy Analyst 828-5104 peter.thoms@state.vt.us	Susan Hayes, Assessment Coordinator 828-5892 susan.hayes@state.vt.us	Lucille Chicoine, Administrative Assistant 828-5922 lucille.chicoine@state.vt.us
	Lindy Johnson, Reading Assessment Coord. 828-6562 lindy.johnson@state.vt.us	Nancy Hill, Administrative Assistant 828-3124 nancy.hill@state.vt.us